

CAPITAL REPORT

Whole Truth Is Hidden By 'Security Deletions'

By FULTON LEWIS, JR.

WASHINGTON, April 5.—A device known as "security deletion" is among the reasons that the public never gets the full truth about the scandals that fester in the foreign aid program around the world.

In Congressional hearings, International Cooperation Administration officials plead that entire blocks of testimony be kept secret as a matter of diplomatic policy, and committee chairmen, interested only in getting the information for their own use and that of committee members, do not demur. Thus, the deleted material never appears on the public record and is never available for public scrutiny.

The transcript of the House Foreign Affairs Committee hearings on foreign aid operations in Laos contains testimony by Carter DePang, the former foreign aid director in that country, under questioning about recent elections there. Suddenly: "Security deletion."

The story thus prevented from reaching the rank and file citizens of the country is a real shocker. The purported reason it was deleted is that it concerned the activities of the foreign aid mission in attempting to influence the elections by what was popularly known on the scene as "Operation Manhole."

THE ULTIMATE COST to the government was millions of dollars; the stated purpose was to demonstrate to the people of the two northern provinces of Laos—immediately adjacent to Red China—that the West had a deep personal interest in them, and that they should not go Communist.

Both provinces did, and the Communists won 13 out of the 21 seats in the national legislature, despite the chaotic combined antics of the U.S. military and technical mission, the Central Intelligence Agency, Air Force personnel, Military Advisory Assistance Group, U.S. Embassy, Foreign aid mission and a fleet of special aircraft for airdrop purposes in the jungles.

There was an average of 30 major air drops per day, throughout the four week period, plus innumerable smaller ones.

Originally, the goods were to have been dropped only in the two northern provinces, but they were dropped everywhere. The principal items were rice in bags (many of which broke open on impact with the ground), cement in bags (same fate), corrugated tin roofing, bulldozers and jeeps.

MY PILOT INFORMER estimates that at the very best, not more than 60 percent of the goods were salvageable.

Many of the drops were made within 10 miles of the Communist Chinese border, and he suspects that some, by accident, were actually made on the other side.

Just how the bulldozers and jeeps were expected to be operated and maintained by people in isolated jungle villages who had never seen such mechanical equipment has never been explained.

Fewer than 200 of some 600 parachutes were recovered.

"Security deletion," they say. Which may be so, in the sense of security for the jobs of those responsible for the mess.

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